

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Overview

This document has a two-fold purpose: (1) to assess the current condition of the Mystic River watershed; and (2) to present an action plan for addressing continuing problems in the watershed. This report draws on the work of many people and groups, including the work of the Massachusetts Watershed Initiative's Mystic Basin Team. Its goal is to provide a shared vision of what needs to be done to protect and restore the resources of the watershed, and to lay out a plan for accomplishing the required work.

Chapter Contents

- 1.1 Purpose and Overview
- 1.2 The Massachusetts Watershed Initiative

- Chapter 2 provides an **overview of the watershed** – its resources, history, and communities. This information provides a context for understanding the assessment and action plan presented here.
- Chapters 3 through 6 of this document present the results of the **Assessment**, organized by topic (Chapter 3 on Water Quantity and Flooding, Chapter 4 on Water Quality, Chapter 5 on Land Use and Open Space, Chapter 6 on Recreation, and Chapter 7 on Habitat.)
- Chapter 8 presents the proposed **Action Plan**. This chapter includes a summary of the Massachusetts Watershed Initiative Basin Team's previous work, as well as the results of other watershed planning efforts, as input to the selection of priority actions.

The remainder of this chapter describes the Massachusetts Watershed Initiative program that sponsored this report.

1.2 The Massachusetts Watershed Initiative

The Massachusetts Watershed Initiative was formed in 1993 by community partners and the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs with the following mission:

The Massachusetts Watershed Initiative “preserves, protects, and restores the water resources and ecosystems of the Commonwealth using watersheds as the geographic unit within which diverse interests collaborate, establish priority activities, influence decisions, and achieve measurable results.”

The program involved a five-year management process, which included Annual Work Plans culminating in development and implementation of a Five-Year Watershed Action Plan.¹ The Watershed Initiative served to promote coordination and cooperation among

¹ The five-year basin cycle included a different focus each year: Outreach (Year 1), Research & Monitoring (Year 2); Assessment (Year 3); Watershed Action Plan Development (Year 4); and Implementation &

various watershed interests, to assess conditions in the watersheds, to identify priority projects for addressing problems, and in some cases to provide funding for priority projects. Basin Teams included representatives of Federal, state and local government agencies, non-governmental environmental organizations, businesses and other stakeholders and met on a regular basis. In addition to sharing information on on-going projects, the Teams identified and set priorities for projects to receive state funding in their Annual Workplans. More information on the MWI is provided in Appendix A.

Initially, the Mystic River watershed was included in the larger Boston Harbor watershed, along with the Neponset River watershed, the Weymouth-Weir watershed and Boston Harbor proper.² A sub-team for the Mystic River Watershed later was established later, and an EOEA Team Leader (Kwabena Kyei-Aboagye) was assigned specifically to the Mystic River watershed. This change increased the team's ability to focus on the specific problems of this large and diverse watershed. The Watershed Initiative was discontinued in late 2002. Since then there has been no equivalent formal forum for coordinating activities and priorities across the watershed. As described in Chapter 8, the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA), EOEA's Riverways Program, and City of Somerville staff have convened occasional meetings of the team on an informal basis, under the name "Mystic Partners," and hope to continue these meetings in the future.

This Mystic River Watershed Assessment and Action Plan is initially a product of the Watershed Initiative. Much of this document draws on the Basin Team's work on assessing the watershed and on its Annual Work Plans and the projects therein. Other watershed-level assessments and priority-setting efforts that have informed the selection of priority actions, including the 1999 MA DEP's water quality assessment, the 1999 Future Search event, and the 2003 EJAM environmental justice project. Finally, the draft assessment and action plan have been discussed at several public events, to solicit input – the Launching the Mystic Action Plan event in spring 2005 and three subsequent issue-specific public meetings.

Efforts are currently underway to form a new Eastern Mystic Watershed Alliance (EMWA) – a multi-stakeholder network formed to:

- focus light on and publicize the problems facing the lower portion of the watershed,
- marshal resources for this most urbanized portion of the watershed similar to those which have transformed the Charles River; and
- provide a forum for communication among the diverse parties using the watershed's resources.

This initiative developed out of discussions about the draft Action Plan, and is an important step in developing capacity to move forward on watershed goals.

Evaluation (Year 5). The state's watersheds were on staggered schedules, and once a watershed had completed one cycle it would start again with Year 1 of the process.

² The schedule for the Boston Harbor Watershed included Year 3 Assessment in 2000, Year 4 Preparation of an Action Plan in 2001, and Year 5 Implementation & Evaluation in Year 2002.

While there have been substantial efforts to develop watershed and action plans goals for the Mystic, it is important that the effort be viewed as a work in progress. More effort is needed to develop concrete implementation plans, along with specific commitments from various stakeholders to make this plan a reality.

Comments on the assessment results and on the choice of action priorities are welcome from all parties, and should be addressed to:

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